DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 309 910 RC 017 196

AUTHOR Raymond, Frank B., III
TITLE Providing Social Work Education and Training in Rural Areas through Interactive Television.
PUB DATE Jul 88
NOTE 14p.; Paper presented at the Annual National Institute on Social Work and Human Services in Rural Areas (13th, Fort Collins, CO, July 24-27, 1988).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Information Analyses (070) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Access to Education; Audiovisual Instruction; *Closed Circuit Television; *Distance Education; Higher Education; Information Networks; Postsecondary Education; Professional Continuing Education; Rural Areas; *Rural Education; *Social Work; Teleconferencing; *Telecourses
IDENTIFIERS *Interactive Television; Social Work Educators; South Carolina; University of South Carolina

ABSTRACT

This paper describes how a school of social work in a predominantly rural state made successful use of interactive closed circuit television (ICCT) to train and offer continuing education to rural social workers. While the overall rate of rural population growth has declined in recent years, social problems in these areas have increased, a situation resulting in the need for more social services and more trained social work practitioners. Other reasons for the increased need for social work training include: (1) the growth of job opportunities in social work and related fields; (2) the dramatic increase in the number of states that regulate social work practice; (3) the influence of accrediting bodies; and (4) the desire by agencies for better trained social workers. While there has been a proliferation of part-time study programs in graduate social work education, many of them remain inaccessible to rural students. The ICCT program at the College of Social Work at the University of South Carolina provides education and training in rural areas. The system links the main campus with over 20 "classrooms" in university branches and technical schools throughout the state and has helped more than 200 students from rural areas to receive their masters degrees. It also provides continuing education opportunities, such as teleconferencing, for human services workers in the field. This paper concludes that it is incumbent upon social work educators to utilize state-of-the-art technology to meet the needs of its constituents. Contains 10 references. (TES)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

ED309910

PROVIDING SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN RURAL AREAS THROUGH INTERACTIVE TELEVISION

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Frank B. Raymond III
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

FRANK B. RAYMOND, III

Introduction

During recent years there has been an increasing demand for professionally trained social workers in rural areas. Likewise, there has been a growing need for continuing education for social workers already employed in rural areas. Regrettably, schools of social work have not been able to address these needs adequately. This paper will describe how a school of social work in a predominantly rural state has made successful use of interactive television to meet these education and training needs. This approach, which has proven to be effective and efficient, provides a model which can be replicated in other rural areas throughout the country.

Education and Training Needs in Rural Areas

The growing need for formal social work training as well as continuing education opportunities in rural areas has resulted from several factors. First, demographic factors have contributed to an increase in social service needs in rural areas and for trained personnel to provide these services. According to the 1980 census, for the first time in a 160 years the rate of growth in the U.S. population was higher in rural and small-town communities than in metropolitan areas (Beale, 1981). As this growth has occurred poverty and related social

RC017196

problems in rural areas have increased. Today poverty is disproportionately rural, especially for minorities. Even though only 25% of the nation's population resides in non-metropolitan locales, approximately 47% of the identified poor are concentrated in these areas (Report #6, H1983). The rural poor, especially members of racial and ethnic minority groups, are some of the nation's poorest individuals, and they experience high rates of ill-health, malnutrition, infant morbidity and mortality, lack of job-training, and substandard housing (Martinez-Brawley, 1987).

By the mid 1980's, the rate of rural population growth had slowed considerably and had been surpassed by the growth rate of metropolitan areas. This recent trend has led some writers to speculate that the so called "rural renaissance" has come to an end (Edwards, 1988). However, while the overall rate of rural growth has declined in recent years, social problems in these areas have increased, resulting in the need for more social services and more trained social work practitioners.

A second reason for the increased need of social work training and education in rural areas is the growth of job opportunities in newly-developing fields of social work practice. This growth, of course, has occurred in both urban and rural areas. For example, there has been a proliferation of employee assistance programs in recent years, and more and more social workers are working in such programs. Furthermore with the development of new health and social problems, such as AIDS, there has been a need for social workers having specialized training. The growth of certain population groups, such as the elderly, have also resulted in the need for social workers who have specialized training in certain areas of practice (U.S. Department of Labor, 1986).

A third factor which has increased the need for better trained social work personnel in both rural and urban areas is the dramatic increase of states that legally regulate social work practice. As more states have passed legislation requiring social workers to be licensed, agencies have changed their manner of filling vacant positions. Whereas it was possible in earlier years to hire persons as "social workers" who had little or no training in the field, now agencies must employ persons who have social work training and see to it that they are provided with appropriate continuing education opportunities to keep their skills up-to-date. This has caused problems for rural areas, in particular.

A fourth factor which has brought about the increased demand for social work education and training in rural areas is the influence of accrediting bodies. Organizations which must comply with certification and accreditation requirements, such as hospitals and nursing homes, often must meet personnel standards. While this demand has been felt in both urban and rural areas, it is often more difficult for rural-based institutions to locate adequately trained social workers.

Finally, social agencies themselves, in an effort to respond to the present emphasis on accountability, have sought better-trained social workers in order to enhance effectiveness and efficiency. Rural agency administrators have recognized that better trained personnel result in more efficient programs, and they have raised their hiring standards accordingly.

The Response of Social Work Education

While there has been a growing need for professionally trained social work personnel and for the provision of continuing education opportunities in rural areas, schools of social work have not been able to address these needs adequately. Rural agencies are often unable to obtain persons with BSW degrees to provide beginning level practice. It is even more difficult for rural agencies to obtain persons with MSW degrees. Most graduate social work education programs are located in metropolitan areas, not easily accessible to rural dwellers. Persons who live in rural locales and who desire to pursue graduate training in social work are often unable to do so because the education is not made available locally. Social work training stipends are not as readily available as they were in earlier years, and many persons from rural areas who would like to return to school to pursue a master's degree on a full-time basis cannot afford to do so. Furthermore, because of family obligations, work responsibilities, and other life circumstances, it is often difficult, if not impossible, for these potential students to commute to distant locations where social work education is offered.

One obvious answer to this problem would be for schools of social work to develop means of extending formal programs of study into rural locales. Some schools have been able to do this successfully through the development of branch campuses, part-time programs of study, week-end programs, and so on. Through such alternative programs students are able to pursue graduate education on a part-time basis, usually while continuing to work in social agencies.

There has been a proliferation of programs of part-time study in graduate social work education in recent years (Council on Social Work Education, 1985). Unfortunately, many of these part-time programs of study have not met the needs of rural areas. While they have provided ideal education opportunities to persons in metropolitan areas who wish to pursue social work education on a part-time basis, these programs are often inaccessible to persons who live in rural areas.

Part-time social work education programs based in rural areas have encountered difficulty for a number of reasons. A primary reason is the excessive cost involved. Some schools have begun part-time programs in rural areas and, in spite of strong beginnings, have found that the programs could not be maintained because of financial reasons. While the beginning group of students may have been large enough to justify the offering of courses at locations distant from the main campus, the high attrition rates often make it economically unfeasible to maintain these efforts. A number of schools which have begun such off-campus programs have found it impossible to continue them. Furthermore, faculty are often reluctant to commute long distances to these off-campus locations, and even those with the best of intentions soon become weary of these weekly treks.

Accreditation standards have also contributed to the reluctance of some schools of social work to establish off-campus programs in rural areas. Recognizing the need for social work education programs that respond to the special needs of students, the Commission on Accreditation of the Council on Social Work Education has allowed for the development of "Experimental or Innovative Programs" and "Alternative Programs", and

has developed standards by which such programs are to be evaluated (Commission on Accreditation, 1988). Because of the perceived difficulty in meeting the Commission's standards, however, some schools of social work have been reluctant to develop alternative programs.

There has been debate in social work education circles regarding these Commission's standards for part-time programs. Some academicians believe that the Commission is rigid and unrealistic in its demands. (The Commission did, however, relax its standards for part-time programs somewhat in 1987-88.) Others have felt that the standards are not as rigorous as they should be. Critics point to the erosion of educational quality, arguing that library resources are often inadequate, part-time students do not become appropriately socialized to the profession, the desired "faculty mix" is often unrealized, proper sequencing of courses cannot occur, and field practicum sites are not always adequate (The Task Force on the Future Role and Structure of Graduate Social Work Education, 1983). Because of concerns such as these, a number of schools have been unwilling to establish part-time programs.

In many rural areas the continuing education needs of social workers have also been inadequately addressed by schools of social work. Again, costs are a factor. Whereas schools of social work can provide continuing education opportunities on-campus for agencies which are located in close proximity, it is often economically unfeasible for schools to offer such opportunities at distant locations in rural areas. In addition to the usual program costs, the transportation and per diem expenses can make such educational offerings quite expensive. Furthermore, faculty members are often unable to commute to distant locations to teach seminars or conduct workshops because of their teaching schedules. While it is

not difficult to drive across town to conduct a workshop even on the same day one teaches in the classroom, it is quite another matter to drive 200 miles to conduct a workshop and then be back in the classroom the following day.

The Use of Interactive Closed Circuit, Television

The College of Social Work at the University of South Carolina has provided education and training in rural areas through the use of interactive closed circuit television (ICCT). This school, which is located in a predominantly rural state, has found this modality to be an effective and efficient solution (Weinbach, Gandy & Tartaglia, 1984).

Because of reasons such as those described above--cost, time, distance, family circumstances, etc.-- many prospective students in rural areas of South Carolina cannot avail themselves of graduate social work education at the University's main campus. Furthermore, after several noble efforts at off-campus teaching, the school determined that there were not enough students grouped together at any one outlying area to sustain the off-campus education model.

The faculty of the College decided to experiment with the utilization of the ICCT modality to provide graduate education to its rural students. Other colleges within the University, notably the College of Business Administration and the College of Engineering, had already begun to offer courses through this medium. Hence, the University already had studio classroom facilities and other needed

supports. The ICCT system at the University is a component of the South Carolina Educational Television System. The system links the main campus with over 20 "classrooms" in University branches and technical schools throughout the state. The teacher conducts class from a studio classroom in Columbia and she/he can be seen and heard by students in the classroom settings in the rural locations. Furthermore, these students can "talk back" to the teacher and other students at sites throughout the state. Classes are taught in the afternoon, usually from 5:30 to 7:00pm. Additionally, students typically attend three Saturday classes at the main campus each semester for orientation, examinations, critique of the approach, and general class discussion.

The College of Social Work offers all of its foundation courses (excluding methods) through ICCT. In compliance with the requirements of the Commission on Accreditation, the College requires that these students complete second year residency on campus. However, the second year field practicum can occur within the student's own community, minimizing somewhat the amount of time she/he must spend at the main campus. This plan approximates what Granger and Nooe have called the "feeder model" (1982).

Initially it was necessary for the College to receive permission from the Commission on Accreditation to implement the ICCT approach as an "Experimental and Innovative Program." Accordingly, the program had to be thoroughly evaluated over an extented time. After numerous reports were submitted to the Commission and the program was evaluated by the Commission at the time of the College's regular site visit and

reaffirmation review, the Commission granted authorization for the College to continue to use the ICCT modality as a component of its regular MSW degree program. Indeed, the data reviewed by the Commission in arriving at this decision revealed that students who complete their foundation courses in the masters degree program though ICCT perform as well academically throughout their course of study as students who complete their entire coursework through the "traditional" classroom approach. Furthermore, the data revealed that the vast majority of students who participated in the ICCT program gave strong endorsement to this approach. Many of them acknowledged that they would not have been able to complete their masters degree study had it not been for this alternative (Katz & Elliott, 1979).

During the eight years the College has used the ICCT approach, over 200 students from rural areas have received their masters degree through participation in this program. Furthermore, hundreds of other social agency employees who were not seeking the MSW degree have taken courses through ICCT education in order to enhance their social work knowledge and skills and improve their professional performance.

In addition to offering formal course work through ICCT, the College of Social Work has made available a number of continuing education events to human service professionals in rural areas throughout South Carolina. This modality makes it possible to offer workshops and seminars to large numbers of trainees at minimal costs in terms of both time and dollars. Traditionally, continuing education entails bringing human service professionals together at a central location for one or more days, or

offering the seminar/workshop numerous times at various regional locations. Both approaches are expensive.

When workshops and seminars are provided through the television medium for continuing education purposes, social workers are generally given release time from their jobs to attend these training sessions at the regional classrooms. Sessions may be held on a regular basis dealing with specialized topics. Or, the continuing education may be offered in a conference format (teleconferencing), utilizing social work faculty, agency trained specialists, or nationally known experts. In both arrangements participants are in direct communication with each other and with workshop/seminar leaders.

Over the past eight years the College has offered a variety of continuing education events through ICCT. Most of these offerings have been sponsored by the College's "Center for Child and Family Studies." Through federal grants and through contracts with public and private agencies, the Center has utilized television to present workshops and seminars dealing with a variety of topics such as adoptions, foster care, abuse and neglect, supervision and administration. ICCT training through the Center has been well received by South Carolina social agencies. These agencies have made extensive use of this alternative for staff development and training.

As early as 1979 the Office of Human Development Services sponsored research to investigate the potential and cost-effectiveness of delivering state agency staff training through telecommunications (Katz & Elliott, 1979).

While the results of that study were encouraging, it appears that few states have made extensive use of this approach to staff training, and few schools of social work have been involved in such activity. The South Carolina experience, however, underscores the value of this method in providing high quality continuing education to large numbers of rural agency staff at miminal cost.

Conclusion

It is incumbent upon social work education to utilize state-of-the-art technology to respond to the needs of its constituents as effectively as possible. As predominantly rural states develop improved telecommunications technology for public education, schools of social work in these states can employ the model described in this paper to respond to the increasing demands for social work education and training in rural areas. Through the use of ICCT schools of social work can provide formal programs of study as well as continuing education to scores of human service professionals in rural areas who would otherwise have limited access to such opportunities.

REFERENCES

Beale,C.(1981). Rural and small town population change, 1970-80 Washington, DC: Economics and Statistics Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Council On Social Work Education. (1986). Statistics on social work education in the United States: 1985. Washington, DC: Author.

Council On Social Work Education.(1988). Handbook of accreditation standards and procedures, 1988. Washington, DC: Author.

Edwards, R. L. "Reaganomics and rural America". Human Services In The Rural Environment. Vol II (pp.14-19). Silver Springs, Md.: National Association of Social Workers.

Granger, B. and Nooe, R. Rural responsiveness in social work education. In L. Morris (Ed.). Dignity, Diversity, And Opportunity In Changing Rural Areas. (pp. 385-397). Columbia, SC: College of Social Work, University of South Carolina.

Katz, R. and Elliott, L. (1979). Staff training via telecommunications: analysis of needs and delivery alternatives. Denver, Colorado: Denver Research Institute, University of Denver.

Martinez-Brawley, "Rural social work," In Encyclopedia of Social Work. (18th ed.) (pp. 521-53).

Rural Coalition. (1983.) Report # 6 Washington, DC: Author. E.E. (1987).

The Task Force On The Future Role And Structure Of Graduate Social Work Education. (1983). Strategic issues in the future role and structure of graduate social work education in the United States. Seattle, Washington: School of Social Work, University of Washington.

US Department of Labor. (1986). Unpublished tables. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

Weinbach, R., Gandy, J. and Tartaglia, L. (1984) Addressing the needs of the part-time student through interactive closed-circuit television: an evaluation. Arete 9, 12-20.